

# ***U.S. PATENT APPLICATION***

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*Invention:* REMOTE TESTING OF A COMMUNICATIONS LINE

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## ***SPECIFICATION***

## REMOTE TESTING OF A COMMUNICATIONS LINE

### BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

#### 5 1. FIELD OF THE INVENTION

This invention relates to a method of, and apparatus for, remotely testing a communications line, and more particularly to a method of, and apparatus for, testing a communications line to ascertain its suitability, under high frequency transmissions, 10 for transmitting data at high bit rates.

#### 2. DESCRIPTION OF RELATED ART

There is a need to conduct tests and perform measurements on a 15 communications line, including a telephone line, such as the characteristics of line loss, noise and resistance. This is so that the line's suitability for high frequency digital systems like pair gain, basic rate ISDN and Internet connections can be established. Generally, at high frequencies, the loss in signal magnitude is much higher than at low frequencies. For example, at 100kHz, the line loss can be as much 20 as 45 dB for a small pair gain system. This is primarily due to the increase in inductance on the line as frequency increases. A Plain Ordinary Telephone Service (POTS) line can often tolerate adverse transmission conditions caused by bridged taps, split pairs, poor joints and low insulation resistance. However, these conditions seriously affect the operation of high frequency digital systems and therefore must be 25 identified.

Previously there has been no known method of measuring line loss and for 30 performing all other necessary measurements remotely from the receiving end of a communications line. One arrangement has consisted in setting up identical measuring instruments one at each end of the line under test. Each instrument is very expensive and furthermore, switching of the instruments between different functions to be measured has to be performed manually. There is also known Australian Patent No. 604878, in the name of the applicant, which discloses a system for remotely disconnecting and short-circuiting a pair of conductors. However, the system

disclosed therein does not facilitate remotely switching between a plurality of measurement functions such that the required circuit elements to enable such measurement are connected to the communications line at both ends of the line, that is, the sender end and the receiver end. The disclosed system only permits sequential 5 switching between functions and does not allow for random switching from one function to another in order to connect circuitry across a communications line to enable a characteristic to be measured and/or tested.

#### SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

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According to a first aspect of the present invention there is provided an apparatus for remotely measuring characteristics of a communications line comprising:

15            receiver means for connection to a remote end of the communications line;  
          sender means for connection to the other end of the communications line;  
          said receiver means generating a signal in response to a selection of one of a plurality of characteristics of said line to be measured;  
          said signal uniquely representing said selected characteristic;  
          said signal being transmitted along the communications line toward the sender 20 means;

          said sender means having detection means for detecting said signal, and switching means;

25            such that on detection of said signal and, on the basis of the unique representation of the signal, the switching means is controlled so as to connect predetermined circuitry across the line at said other end and at said remote end to enable a selected characteristic of the line to be measured.

30            Preferably, said signal is generated by signal generation means and is assigned a unique code, such as a sequence of pulses representing characteristics to be measured.

Preferably, when the signal is detected by said detection means, said signal is converted into a digital code and forwarded to a processing means, such as a microprocessor, which controls the switching means on the basis of the digital code representing the signal. Preferably, said switching means is in the form of a set of 5 relays.

According to a second aspect there is provided a method of remotely measuring characteristics of a communications line, comprising the steps of:

10 connecting receiver means to a remote end of the communications line;  
connecting sender means to the other end of the communications line;  
causing the receiver means to generate a signal in response to a selection of one of a plurality of characteristics of said line to be measured, said signal uniquely representing said selected characteristic;  
transmitting said signal along the communications line toward the sender 15 means;

detecting said signal through the sender means and, on the basis of the unique representation of the signal, controlling switching means to connect predetermined circuitry across the line at said other end and at said remote end to enable a selected characteristic of the line to be measured.

20 According to a third aspect there is provided a method of testing a communications line so as to ascertain and measure one or more characteristics of the communications line employing random switching between functions to select said characteristics, the method comprising the steps of:

25 connecting receiver means to a remote end of the communications line;  
connecting sender means to the other end of the communications line;  
generating a signal in response to the random selection on said receiver means of one of said one or more characteristics, said signal uniquely representing the selected characteristic;  
30 transmitting said signal to said sender means along said communications line;  
detecting said signal at said sender means; and

connecting predetermined circuitry, on the basis of said unique representation, across the communications line at said other end and said remote end to enable the selected characteristic to be ascertained and measured.

5 According to a fourth aspect there is provided apparatus for testing a communications line so as to ascertain and measure a plurality of characteristics of the line said apparatus comprising:

receiver means for connection to a remote end of the communications line;  
sender means for connection to the other end of the communications line;

10 selection means enabling the random selection of one of said characteristics;

said receiver means generating a signal in response to the random selection of one of said characteristics;

said signal uniquely representing the selected characteristic and being transmitted along the communications line for receipt by the sender means;

15 detection means for detecting said transmitted signal;

switching means for connecting predetermined circuitry across the line at said other end and at said remote end; and

such that on detection by said detection means of said transmitted signal, said switching means connects said predetermined circuitry to enable the selected  
20 characteristic to be ascertained and measured.

#### **BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS**

The invention will now be described in a preferred embodiment, by way of  
25 example only, with reference to the accompanying drawings wherein:

Figure 1 is a block diagram of a communications line having receiver unit and sender unit connected to each end of the line;

30 Figure 2 is a front view of the receiver unit panel;

Figure 3 is a block diagram showing an example of the operation of the sender unit in response to a signal being generated at the receiver unit;

Figure 4 is a block diagram of the internal circuitry of the receiver unit;

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Figure 5 is a block diagram of circuitry required for a 3kHz loss measurement;

Figure 6 is a block diagram of circuitry required for an 820 Hz loss measurement:

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Figure 7 is a block diagram of circuitry required for a 100kHz loss measurement:

Figure 8 is a block diagram of circuitry required to perform noise measurements on the communications line;

Figure 9 is a block diagram of circuitry required to detect split pairs of a communications line:

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Figure 10 is a block diagram of a communications line set up to measure insulation resistance on the line:

Figure 11 is a block diagram of a communications line set up to measure loop resistance on the line:

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Figure 12 is a block diagram of a communications line set up to measure DC voltage on the line;

Figure 13 shows circuitry in the sender unit and a probe unit at the other end of a communications line to identify pairs of conductors of the line; and

Figure 14 is a block diagram of an exchange through connection.

## DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

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Figure 1 shows apparatus 2 for performing test measurements on a communications line 4 having conductors 10 and 12. At the exchange side of the line 4, sender means in the form of a sender unit 6 is connected between conductors 10 and 12 at terminals 14 and 16 and at the receiver end of line 4 is connected receiver means in the form of a receiver unit 8 at terminals 18 and 20. Alternatively the sender unit 6 can be connected across line 4 at a pillar or pit. Receiver unit 8 is used to display test results on line 4 and to remotely control the sender unit 6. Additionally a probe unit is used for identification of a pair of conductors of the line, to be described later. The apparatus 2 is able to connect and disconnect a short-circuit (strap). While the line 4 is short-circuited, the apparatus 2 may decode signals transmitted from receiver unit 8 to sender unit 6.

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Apparatus 2 is able to perform a number of tests or measurements including the characteristics of line loss, measurements at various frequencies, noise on the line 4, insulation resistance, loop resistance and DC voltage, all remotely from receiver unit 8. It also is capable of performing tests for split pairs of conductors using capacitance unbalance and pair identification and enables connection or disconnection of the conductors from the exchange. The pair identification and remote connection and disconnection is described in Australian Patent No. 604878.

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In Figure 2, there is shown a receiver unit 8 having function keys or buttons 22.

The user may depress a particular key at random and the required function is switched into the line 4. Alternatively, more than one key or button may be depressed to select the required function or characteristic. The measured value is then displayed on the multi-character alpha-numeric LCD 24.

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Figure 3 shows an example of the apparatus 2 in operation. With the sender unit 6 and receiver unit 8 connected at respective ends of communications line 4, the user at the receiver end may depress any required button 22 to perform a test on the

line 4. In depressing a button 22, a signal is sent to a signal generator 26 which emits a coded series of timed pulses at 171 Hz, each coded series of pulses representing a signal for each test function. For example, to test for line loss at 100kHz, the signal may be represented by a sequence of two pulses, followed by no pulse and then one 5 more pulse. This signal is transmitted over line 4 to sender unit 6 whereupon the signal is filtered by filter 28 and detected by detector means 30. The sequence is then converted or translated into the digital code 1101 and transmitted to processor means in the form of microprocessor 32 which directs or switches switching means 34 in the form of a bank of relays 34, such that the appropriate relay allows predetermined 10 circuitry based on the code, to be connected between conductors 10 and 12 of line 4. In this example, code 1101 is for the 100 kHz oscillator. Therefore its relay is closed and the 100 kHz oscillator in sender section 36 is connected between the conductors 10 and 12.

15 It is to be noted that any other form of switching means may be used, such as those fabricated from semiconductors as is well known in the art. It is also to be understood that a digital code, representing the selected characteristic to be measured or test to be performed, may be transmitted directly as a signal along line 4 in response to a depression of one or ~~more~~ of the buttons 22 and processed by the microprocessor 20 32.

Thus the switching ~~between~~ modes or characteristics to be measured is performed at random such that the signal sent along line 4 from the signal generator 26 to the sender unit 6 is coded to allow corresponding circuitry to be connected to the 25 line 4 at both ends. Thus, the user can change from one mode to another mode randomly without having to switch sequentially through all modes or functions on the receiver unit 8. By pressing the appropriate button the sender unit can be switched, for example, from pair identification mode directly to short-circuit mode or directly to open-circuit mode to enable various tests or characteristics to be measured and 30 ascertained.

Connection to the conductors 10 and 12 of various circuit elements for each test function will now be described with reference to Figure 4.

In Figure 5 there is shown a circuit in which line 4 is being measured to 5 determine a value for a 3 kHz loss. When a button 22 corresponding to a 3kHz loss measurement is depressed, the code is sent to the sender unit 6, as described previously, and the circuitry at section 36 is connected between the conductors 10, 12. Specifically, a 3 kHz oscillator 38 and a impedance 40 is connected, the impedance 10 40 being  $600\Omega$  or TN 12. The exchange side of the line 4 is "busied" by the insertion of a  $990\Omega$  resistor so that incoming calls are not connected through to line 4. In operation a 3 Khz, -10dBm sinusoidal signal is connected to the line at the sender and the receiver unit 8 measures the line loss. A  $600\Omega$  resistor or TN12 termination 42 is inserted between conductors 10 and 12 at the receiver unit 8. The sinusoidal signal is then switched by relay 48 through to amplifier 50, filter 44 and rectifier 52 before 15 being averaged and passed onto analogue to digital converter (ADC) 56. Therefore, voltmeter 46 measures the signal magnitude and is converted to a decibel reading and output to LCD 24 of the receiver unit 8 so as to give a loss reading.

Similarly in Figure 6, to determine the loss on line 4 at 820Hz, the appropriate 20 button 22 is pressed. At the sender unit 6, a 820Hz oscillator 60 and  $600\Omega$  or TN12 impedance 58 is connected between the conductors 10 and 12. An 820Hz, -10dBm sinusoidal signal is transmitted down the line 4 toward receiver unit 8 and the line loss measured. The signal is switched by relay 62, then amplified, filtered, rectified and averaged before passing on to ADC 56 for conversion into decibels from voltmeter 68.

25 In Figure 7 is shown a circuit arrangement for measuring loss on line 4 at 100kHz. Again a corresponding button 22 is pressed, a signal generated by generator 26 and coded and transmitted to sender unit 6. A 100kHz oscillator 70 and complex impedance 72 having a value of  $(120-j23) \Omega$  is connected in the line 4 based on the 30 assigned code. A 100kHz, 0 dBm sinusoidal signal is sent down line 4. To minimize reflections on line 4 a matched impedance 74 having the same magnitude of

impedance 72 is connected between conductors 10 and 12. This is after the signal has passed through relay 76, amplifier 78, filter 80, rectifier 82 and averager 54. The signal is then forwarded to ADC 56 after being read by voltmeter 84 and then converted to decibels to be read on LCD 24 as a loss at 100kHz.

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To measure the amount of noise on line 4, a  $600\Omega$  resistor 86 is connected between conductors 10 and 12 when the appropriate button is depressed on the receiver unit 8, as shown in Figure 8. A corresponding  $600\Omega$  resistor 88 is connected on the receiver side of line 4. The signal is switched through relay 98 before being amplified by gain amplifier 100. A 3 kHz filter 102 is applied to the signal resulting in a 3 kHz flat noise signal from which a measurement is taken after it is applied to a peak detector 104 and buffered. Voltmeters 90, 92 and 94 measure the received noise signal between the conductors 10 and 12 and between each conductor and ground. The readings from the voltmeters is then converted to decibels and applied to ADC 56 to be read out on LCD 24.

To detect split pairs, capacitive unbalance is measured on line 4. The line 4 is effectively open-circuited at the sender unit 6 as shown in Figure 9. The receiver unit 8 measures the capacitive unbalance of the conductors 10, 12 to ground through voltmeter 118. Relay 108 is closed to enable the receiver circuitry, wherein a 3 kHz oscillator 110 is fed to each input of amplifier 112 through appropriate impedances 114 and 116. The output of amplifier 112 is passed through filter 44 and then fed to the ADC 56 via rectifier 52 and averager 54. The LCD readout 24 displays the measured value.

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To measure the insulation resistance on line 4, the sender unit 6 is connected to line 4 so that it is in the open-circuit condition as shown in Figure 10. Generally, insulation resistance is measured at high voltage, typically using a 500VDC source, as many of the digital systems mentioned previously are line powered by voltages up to 320VDC. Nothing is connected between the terminals in accordance with the specific code received by the sender in response to the IR button being depressed on the

receiver unit 8. In the receiver unit, the insulation resistance is measured between the conductors 10 and 12 and between each conductor and ground via ohm meters 124, 126 and 128. The signals are then amplified by amplifier 122 and a digital readout of the measured values is shown on LCD 24. Each test performed by the receiver unit 8 is continued for about 20 seconds so as to allow enough time for weak insulation to fail. The line 4 is then discharged on completion of the test.

Figure 11 shows the apparatus set up to measure loop resistance on line 4. At the sender unit 6 the appropriate code is set to operate relay 134 such that the conductors 10 and 12 are short-circuited and therefore the line 4 is looped at 130. The loop resistance is measured by ohmmeter 132 and the signal amplified by amplifier 122 before being output to the LCD 24. In this loop mode, the receiver unit 8 may have terminals to facilitate the connection of external test instruments such as Pulse Echo Testers (PETs), Direct Reading Bridges and Multimeters. This enables calibration of the PETs and tests for finding bridge fault locations.

Furthermore, while the line 4 is short-circuited at the sender end, the sender unit 6 can still decode or detect the unique control signal transmitted by signal generator 26, which is representative of another characteristic of the line 4 to be measured. It does this by use of a current transformer which receives the signal whilst in this short-circuit mode of operation.

To measure DC voltage on line 4, the line is opened or isolated from the exchange and all sender unit circuitry, that is, it is put in an open-circuit condition. Voltages between the conductors 10 and 12, and between each conductor and ground are measured by voltmeters 136, 138 and 140, referring to Figure 12. The voltage signals are applied through relay 142 to gain amplifier 144 and full-wave rectifier 146, before being converted to digital form and read out on LCD 24. External instruments can also be connected to terminals on receiver unit 8.

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Pair identification may be undertaken on telephone lines for the purpose of locating a fault or for installation of a telephone to be connected between a pair of

lines. A warble tone oscillator 148 having a frequency between 2 and 3kHz is connected at the sender unit between the pair of conductors to be identified, as shown in Figure 13. A source impedance 150 of 600 ohms is also connected between the pair of conductors 10 and 12. The tone is sent down the line 4 and, at the remote end, a probe unit 152 is used to detect the tone which is converted to an audio output. The audio output indicates to the user that the correct pair of conductors is identified as having the loudest signal and the area of no signal, or null, is located midway between the conductors. The warble oscillator may be connected between the conductors either at the sender unit 6 or from the receiver unit 8 remotely. The frequency of the warble tone is adjustable so that two or three senders can be distinguished.

With reference to Figure 14, the conductors 10 and 12 are connected directly to the exchange and there is no 990 ohm resistor. The connection is again controlled by receiver unit 8 generating a suitable code to the sender unit 6 so that the conductors are directly connected to the exchange. The receiver unit 8 then is able to measure DC line voltages between the conductors 10 and 12 and between each conductor and ground through voltmeters 154, 156 and 158.

The sender unit 6, receiver unit 8 and probe unit 152 are each powered by 9V alkaline batteries. The sender unit can also be powered from the 48V to 52V DC exchange battery via standard MDF battery jacks. Power saving measures are employed to maximise the battery life. The receiver unit 8 switches off after a period of inactivity to conserve power.